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Our County Archives

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The establishment of the fort was celebrated by a series of programmes embracing notable addresses by Dr. B. F. Shambaugh and Prof. W. C. Wilcox of the Iowa State University, Governors Cummins of Iowa and Van Sant of Minnesota, Dr. William Salter of Burlington, and Hon. J. D. M. Hamilton of Topeka, Kansas. Citizens of Fort Madison and Lee county have done many things toward fixing and perpetuating facts concerning historical persons and events, but in nothing have they accomplished more than in this celebration. The various pageants, exercises and addresses, splendidly handled by the newspapers, made the people acquainted with the earliest of civilized activities in that part of the State. A stimulation of patriotism and local pride and a dissemination of historical learning, especially to the younger generations has resulted. A purpose to rebuild the "lone chimney" or otherwise visibly mark the spot of the building of the fort was fixed in the public mind, and a fund almost sufficient to carry it out was left in hand.

OUR COUNTY ARCHIVES.

Iowa has become conscious of the value of her State archives, and has done much toward expressing appreciation of these. She is pursuing a plan not only to preserve those of the past and present, but to make them and those of the future available to the public. An appropriation of six thousand dollars a year for two years to be expended for this purpose under the direction of the executive council was made by the last General Assembly. But of county statistical and genealogical matter not in current use less care has been taken. It may be shown in our recent experience.

The Historical Department discovered and secured "the old papers" of a modest Iowa citizen whose death occurred about 1880. He had resided in the State from its admission to the Union. He had held no public office and was unknown beyond his town. He had witnessed the removal of his county's offices from room to room and from building to

building. He had shared anxiety with other substantial tax payers over vital municipal, county, state and national issues, and had gathered and preserved the written and printed matter assailing as well as supporting his views. These have a value of their own. So far the collection which remained undisturbed for nearly thirty years can not be said to be unusual. But in the same receptacle were found original documentary records of his county as follows: Bonds of county recorders, school fund commissioners, assessors and their deputies for 1846 and 1847; duplicates of all grocery permits issued in 1840; judge's bar docket 1849; five hundred certificates of labor performed on highways, being from each township in the county, for 1880; annual reports of school district secretaries in each district, showing names of officials and teachers, compensation, courses of study, &c., 1857; tax-lists of two townships, 1856; poll-books of all voting precincts of 1841 to 1845 inclusive; estray records of county commissioners' offices, 1840 to 1855; census rolls of four townships, 1851; county warrant stub books bearing autographs of payees, 1841 to 1849 inclusive.

Aside from the legal obligation on incumbents of office, the moral obligation to sacredly preserve the records of their office is equal to that of accuracy in making current entries. There is no authority anywhere for the abandonment or destruction of documents bearing official character. They are presumptively in existence ever after their creation, and their safe custody is as much a part of the duty of the official as is any other of his functions. If this is neglected, just so much of his salary is unearned. If want of vault space is the explanation he may resort to the courts with perfect assurance where their court records are involved, and surely with the same degree of assurance where other records are in jeopardy. Uncertainty of the whereabouts of early county and municipal records is absurd. In the older, and many of the newer counties this is the case. It would seem quite within the duties of the lawmakers of our State to take steps to retrieve such materials and provide against their further confusion or loss.

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